Listing of the Claims:

This listing of the claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in this application:

1.   (currently amended) A method of automatically renting bicycles by a bicycle rental system comprising interactive terminals, at least one rental management server and locking stations, said interactive terminals ~~which communicate~~ communicating remotely with said rental management server, and each interactive terminal controlling a plurality of locking stations to which the bicycles are locked, said method comprising the following steps:

(a) an initial step comprising the following substeps:

· one of the interactive terminals reads a payment card;

· said interactive terminal communicates with an electronic money server for generating a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, this authorization being valid for a limited period;

· ~~allocating~~ said money server allocates and sends an authorization identifier ~~to said authorization,~~ said authorization identifier identifying the debit authorization and enabling several subsequent rental steps within said maximum value and said limited period; and

· storing the authorization identifier in the rental management server;

(b) at least one subsequent rental step taking place during said limited period and comprising the following substeps:

· a user who wishes to rent a bicycle indicates at least one identity code associated with said authorization identifier;

· the rental management server checks that the identity code indicated by the user corresponds to said authorization identifier stored in said rental management server;

· the bicycle rental being authorized or not authorized as a function of said verification; and

· a rental account in the rental management server increments a rental account corresponding to said authorization identifier; and

(c) a debit step wherein the rental management server communicates to the electronic money server the authorization identifier and an amount to be debited from said account associated with the payment card, said amount being a function of the rental operations effected, inclusively from said initial step, said amount being no more than said maximum value.

2.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the interactive terminal communicates the identity code to a user and, during each subsequent rental step, the identity code is input by said user on an input interface.

3.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the interactive terminal writes the identity code on an information medium, and, during each subsequent rental step, the identity code is read automatically from said information medium.

4.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 3, in which, during the initial step, the interactive terminal issues a ticket bearing said identity code and constituting said information medium.

5.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 4, in which, during the initial step, the identity code is recorded on a magnetic stripe carried by said ticket.

6.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 4, in which the code borne by the ticket is written at least in part during the initial step, after the debit authorization.

7.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 6, in which the code written on the ticket (8) includes the authorization identifier generated during the initial step.

8.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 6, in which the code written on the ticket is pre-written at least in part prior to the initial step, and, during said initial step, the rental management server memorizes a correspondence between the code written on the ticket and the identifier determined during the debit authorization.

9.   (original) A method according to claim 8, in which the code written on the ticket comprises a pre-written portion written before the initial step and a portion written during said initial step.

10.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 4, in which during the initial step, a payment card (6) of predetermined format is used, and the ticket (8) presents said predetermined format.

11.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 10, in which the payment card presents a magnetic stripe having a predetermined position, the ticket also presents a magnetic stripe having the same position, and the identity code is written on the magnetic stripe of said ticket.

12.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, a code borne by a mobile phone is recorded as the identity code, and, during each subsequent rental step, the user calls a predetermined number, the bicycle rental system determines the calling telephone number, and the authorization identifier corresponding to said identity code is thus determined.

13.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during each subsequent rental step, when the bicycle is returned to a locking station, said locking station locks again said bicycle.

14.   (previously presented) A method according claim 1, in which the debit step is implemented at a time that is predetermined relative to the initial step.

15.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which the debit step is implemented when the cumulative cost of the rental operations that have taken place during said limited period reaches a certain predetermined amount that is no more than said maximum value.

16.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which the initial step includes an initial rental step during which, after the debit authorization, at least one bicycle that is locked to a locking station is released, and then, when the bicycle is retuned to a locking station, said bicycle is locked to said locking station again.

17.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, each time a rental operation takes place, the rental management server increments the value of a sum owed by the user of the payment card.

18.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which the bicycle rental system identifies each bicycle at least when said bicycle is taken out and when it is returned, and when a bicycle taken out is not identified as a bicycle returned at the end of a certain predetermined time limit, the rental management server immediately performs the debit step and debits a deposit from said account.

19.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the bicycle rental system determines a confidential code, and, during each subsequent rental step, said bicycle rental system authorizes the rental only after verifying that the confidential code is known by the user requesting the rental.

20.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which provision is made for the confidential code to be chosen by the user during the initial step.

21.   (cancelled)

22.   (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the rental management server memorizes an address given by the user, and said rental management server communicates with the user via said address if a bicycle taken out using the identity code of said user is not returned within a predetermined time limit.

23.   (currently amended) A system for implementing a method according to claim 1, said system comprising:

     . a plurality of bicycles;

     . at least one rental management server;

     . locking stations to which the bicycles are locked;

     · interactive terminals which communicate remotely with said rental management server, and which controls respectively a plurality of said locking stations, said interactive terminals comprising respectively:

· means for reading a payment card;

· means for communicating with an electronic money server for obtaining, with the payment card, a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, said authorization being valid for a limited period, and said authorization being identified by an authorization identifier and enabling several rentals within said maximum value and said limited period;

said rental management server comprising:

· means for memorizing said authorization identifier; and

· means for determining whether an identity code indicated by a user corresponds to said authorization identifier, so a to authorize or not authorize the desired rental of a bicycle as a function of said verification, and so as to increment, each time bicycle rental is effected, a rental account in the rental management server, said rental account corresponding to said authorization identifier; and

the rental management server being adapted to communicate to the electronic money server the authorization identifier and an amount to be debited from said account associated with the payment card, said amount being a function of the rental operations effected and being no more than said maximum value.

24.   (new) A method of automatically renting bicycles by a bicycle rental system comprising interactive terminals, at least one rental management server and locking stations, said interactive terminals which communicate remotely with said rental management server, and each interactive terminal controlling a plurality of locking stations to which the bicycles are locked, said method comprising the following steps:

(a) an initial step comprising the following substeps:

· one of the interactive terminals reads a payment card;

· said interactive terminal communicates with an electronic money server for generating a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, this authorization being valid for a limited period;

· the money server allocates and sends an authorization identifier, said authorization identifier identifying the debit authorization and enabling several subsequent rental steps within said maximum value and said limited period; and

· storing the authorization identifier in the rental management server;

(b) several subsequent rental steps taking place during said limited period, each comprising the following substeps:

· a user who wishes to rent a bicycle indicates at least one identity code associated with said authorization identifier;

· the rental management server checks that the identity code indicated by the user corresponds to said authorization identifier stored in said rental management server;

· the bicycle rental being authorized or not authorized as a function of said verification; and

· the rental management server increments a rental account corresponding to said authorization identifier; and

(c) a final debit step wherein the rental management server communicates to the electronic money server the authorization identifier and an amount to be debited from said account associated with the payment card, said amount being a function of the rental operations effected, inclusively from said initial step, said amount being no more than said maximum value.

25. (new) A system for implementing a method according to claim 24, said system comprising:

. a plurality of bicycles;

. at least one rental management server;

. locking stations to which the bicycles are locked;

· interactive terminals which communicate remotely with said rental management server, and which control respectively a plurality of said locking stations, said interactive terminals comprising respectively:

· means for reading a payment card;

· means for communicating with an electronic money server for obtaining, with the payment card, a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, said authorization being valid for a limited period, and said authorization being identified by an authorization identifier and enabling several rentals within said maximum value and said limited period;

said rental management server comprising:

· means for memorizing said authorization identifier; and

means for determining whether an identity code indicated by a user corresponds to said authorization identifier, so a to authorize or not authorize the desired rental of a bicycle as a function of said verification, and so as to increment, each time bicycle rental is effected, a rental account in the rental management server, said rental account corresponding to said authorization identifier; and

the rental management server being adapted to communicate to the electronic money server the authorization identifier and an amount to be debited from said account associated with the payment card, said amount being a function of the rental operations effected and being no more than said maximum value.